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C O N F I D E N T I A L SOFIA 000473

SIPDIS

FOR EUR DAS BRYZA, ENVOY GRAY, ENERGY COORDINATOR MANN

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SUBJECT: BULGARIANS LOOK FOR U.S. ADVICE ON PROPOSED ENERGY
SUMMIT

REF: SOFIA 0317

Classified By: CDA Alex Karagiannis for reason 1.5 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) During his June U.S. visit, PM Stanishev raised the idea that Bulgaria host a regional energy summit; he returned to that theme during the July 9 visit to Sofia by Secretary Rice, who offered to explore the possibility of a U.S. senior official consulting with the Bulgarians. The PM's Diplomatic Advisor, Valentin Radomirsky, on July 17 provided additional details. The PM's and President Parvanov's senior staff have presented their leaders a joint concept and options paper on dates, level of participation, and format. While they are considering two dates (late this year or April/May 2009) they are strongly leaning to spring 2009 as the most workable. They believe that to be effective, the meeting will have to be at head of state level, as decision making in Central Asian countries resides at the top. They envision the summit bringing together Eurasian and European producers, transit countries and consumers. In addition to the U.S. (recognizing our participation will not be at head of government), they will also invite the EU Commission and Presidency, and Russia. The summit will focus on gas, particularly Nabucco, South Stream and the trans-Caspian/trans-Black Sea energy corridor.

¶2. (C) Radomirsky underscored that Bulgaria would welcome a visit in early September by a senior U.S. energy advisor, which will shape their thinking and planning, especially in how best to deal with Russia. He noted that Bulgarian President Parvanov plans a trip to Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan for late September, and would welcome hearing from us first.

¶3. (C) According to Petar Poptchev, Ambassador for Energy Security and Climate Change and Bulgarian Nabucco Coordinator, the summit will have three goals: outline prospects and capabilities of suppliers; review problems of transit countries; and determine the real energy needs of Europe. Acknowledging the competition to host such high-level energy summits, Poptchev said Bulgaria's close relationships with the United States and Russia as well as with Azerbaijan make it a natural facilitator on Eurasian energy issues. He said the GOB hopes the summit will result in real supply commitments signed by the Azerbaijani President with Bulgaria and other Nabucco partners. The Bulgarians are looking at how best to include energy companies, perhaps through sidebar events, and would welcome our advice.

¶4. (C) Comment: The summit is the latest in a series of efforts to showcase Bulgaria as a regional energy center (Reftel). Stung by U.S. reaction to its South Stream

participation, Bulgaria is now actively seeking cooperation with the United States on energy issues. High level U.S. engagement will re-energize Nabucco, help lead to a more coherent EU energy policy, and draw Caucasus and Central Asian producers closer to market-based energy diversification.

Karagiannis